

Forcing schools to consolidate won't fly out here

Early on, the "C" word rears its ugly head. The legislative session hasn't even started, and a prominent Republican already wants to start consolidating school districts. Senate President Steve Morris, a Hugoton Republican, says the Legislature needs to consider forced consolidations to make Kansas schools "more efficient."

That sounds good, but it's all wrong. Though Mr. Morris says he's talking mostly about small districts that surround and bedevil mammoth eastern Kansas megadistricts, the consolidation net would sweep up a lot of rural schools.

Out in western Kansas, at least, consolidation is well under way. Small districts are merging or folding as their student base disappears. We're fast headed toward the supposed ideal of one district per county.

The real danger, in fact, is that we won't have enough students some places to maintain even that. The specter of students riding 60 to 90 miles to class each day, then repeating the ordeal in the evening, is not inviting.

Many issues complicate any consolidation of eastern districts. Most of the outlying districts are heavily white, while city districts tend to be more diverse. When city parents sent their kids out to the country schools, is that because classes are better taught, or hallways safer, or because the student body is that much whiter?

It's foolish to believe that district consolidation would save the state or anyone else money. It never happens. The money just gets spent.

It's one of the laws of government. Reorganization and consolidation means shuffling the money and the people around, but no actual money is ever saved.

Another thing about consolidation: If the Legislature is serious about the Augenblick and Meyers study, which caused all this trouble and which the Supreme Court relied on to set spending standards, it needs to look at breaking up some of the megadistricts.

That was one of the consultants least-remarked recommendations. The study found that the large city districts — Topeka, Kansas City, Wichita, Shawnee Mission and Blue Valley, for instance — were too big to function well.

So, why not split some of the giants and merge their offspring with some of those pesky rural districts around them? Give the supposedly well run smaller districts more kids, more money — and more color.

Parents should be happy their kids would be in smaller classes in smaller districts.

Educators ought to relish the opportunity to improve education.

Politicians could say they really did something good.

But those big districts are politically powerful and their superintendents aren't going to jump off the gravy train any time soon.

So, what's left?

If consolidation comes up, the Legislature will pick on the little guys as usual.

Let's not go there.

— Steve Haynes

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Debris of return washes over home

I thought the house was a mess before we left for Mexico. You should see it now.

It looks like "The Wreck of the Hesperus" washed ashore in our front room. Mountains of dirty clothes, boxes of Mexican vanilla, plastic tubs of kitchen utensils, sleeping bags, blankets and air mattresses, lost-and-found items we don't know who they belong to, and, of course, containers of leftover food.

Not real food, but stuff like one or two breakfast bars in a box, one or two individual serving size containers of applesauce, a half-eaten package of dried pineapple chunks, and (I know they didn't mean to leave this) a just-opened container of cashews. I'm afraid that will be gone before we find the rightful owner.

Jim managed to keep his tools segregated from the melee that erupted in the house. He knew if he let things get comingled, he wouldn't be able to get back to work for a week.

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



I remember hearing him say something like, "Let's get everything put away before the work week starts."

But he must have said it as I was succumbing to exhaustion. It's Monday morning, and we're still weaving our way between the piles, boxes and crates.

—ob—

I was so proud of our little team of workers. This was the smallest team we have ever built a house with.

Now, we know why the mission group we operate through suggests no less than 12

people on a team. We had 11, and it taxed every one of us to the max. Physically, it was the hardest I have ever had to work on a house. I'm not ready to concede my age might have something to do with it.

As far as fun goes, though, we had a ball. My, how we laughed. We played Bible trivia games in the van and even managed to stump the preacher's wife and the evangelist (Jim) a few times.

No major injuries to report. Just the usual slivers, bruises, aches and pains. With Nurse Charla on board, though, we were prepared for anything short of open-heart surgery. It was like having our own MASH unit.

—ob—

Sleep is the one commodity I'm still short on. As I write this, I catch myself nodding off. It's going to be a long first day back at work.

Maybe if I wear a pair of dark glasses my co-workers won't notice if I doze off every now z-z-z and z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z.

If I had \$1 million, I'd do so much

With the Powerball cash lottery being \$350 million or some such unfathomable amount this past month; I, like a lot of people, dreamed of what I could do with that much money.

In my case I forgot to buy a ticket so the chance I would win was slightly more remote than the average person who did buy tickets.

However, I did think about it (partially because our banker suggested it). We have been doing some loan restructuring. It's probably a bad sign when your banker suggests you buy a Powerball ticket. Is the only way we are ever going to get out of this is if we win the lottery?

If I had won the lottery (after I paid the bank off) I would, of course, give to charity, particularly my church.

I would have my identity kept secret because a former pastor was very opposed to gambling and instilled this in me to a great extent. (But a little Powerball ticket now and then never hurt anyone did it?)

Then I would pay off my siblings debts.

I told others exiled to the "North End Zone" of the KSU football stadium I would buy a Jumbotron for the south end zone so we could see the replays. And I'd set up REAL toilets, not Johnny-on-the-Spots.

It was pointed out to me that if I won the lottery I could buy one of the enclosed

Back Home

Nancy Hagman



boxes with closed circuit televisions so why fix the North End Zone? Hey, I'm a nice person. No matter what, I vow not to forget the common people.

My friend told me if she won she would buy the "boys" (our hubbies) a real nice farm, all new equipment and just let them farm (like the old joke) until it was all gone. Now that's a friend!

We did decide we should invest part of it into something (Exxon-Mobil) for our old age. I'd provide for my kids, of course. But I don't want them to be spoiled. As Blood, Sweat, and Tears so eloquently put it "Momma may have, Poppa may have, but God bless the Child that can stand up and say I got my own."

Daughter Kate, who was once a preschool teacher, says if money were no object she would work as a preschool teacher all her life. She fell in love with 3 year olds. Admittedly that is much easier than loving high school social studies stu-

dents but still it rather surprised me. As a former child care worker, I just have to point out how ironic it is that the worst paid people are entrusted with what we claim is our greatest treasure — young children.

Daughter Patricia, who is enrolling for spring semester with 67 credit hours and being pressured to find a major and stick to it, was agonizing over career paths the other night. "If I do——, I probably won't make as much money," she said. "But, we have never been rich and we are happy."

I have happy kids who love children. I have good friends. Some days I feel like I already won the lottery.

Never having had a lot of money my ideas of what to do with millions and millions of dollars are rather limited.

We like the North End Zone. They say they are going to revamp it as soon as this football season is over. (The way things are going it can't be over soon enough.) I doubt we will be able to see the Jumbotron but hopefully we will get some real bathrooms.

If not, I plan to make a provision in my will to the KSU athletic department for a new facility. I just want it to be named for me. NANC—"Nancy's Annex for the North-end-zone's Comfort". Has a nice ring to it.

Congressman looks to help farmers, ranchers

Congressman Jerry Moran recently chaired a hearing to review the farm economy and the effect of federal policy on agriculture.

"My farmers have few options," Congressman Moran said in his opening statement. "They feed the world, but also have to feed their families. With ever-increasing energy prices, we need to see where this trend is going and ensure they can continue to do both."

Among those testifying were Keith

Collins, chief economist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Sam Funk, administrator of the Kansas State University Farm Management Association Program.

"Producers still use similar amounts of the input for optimal economic production, but their economic returns decrease due to higher input prices," Mr. Funk said. "Across all farms and on a per acre basis, the impact of higher fuel and oil, irrigation energy and fertilizer prices will in-

crease costs in 2005 approximately \$8 to \$10 per acre for farms in Kansas compared to the previous five-year average."

Following the hearing, Mr. Moran committed to continuing his review of the national farm economy and looking for ways to improve the situation of American farmers and ranchers.

He is chairman of the House Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management.